John Lennon

JOHN
LENNON
ROCK'N'ROLL

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ROCK'N'ROLL

BE-BOP-A-LULA

STAND BY ME

Medley:
RIP IT UP / READY TEDDY

YOU CAN'T CATCH ME

AIN'T THAT A SHAME

DO YOU WANNA DANCE

SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN

SLIPPIN' AND SLIDIN'

PEGGY SUE

Medley:
BRING IT ON HOME TO ME /
SEND ME SOME LOVIN'

BONY MORONIE

YA YA

JUST BECAUSE

Rock'N'Roll has one of the strangest back-stories in music folklore. From its unpromising origins in a legal morass and months of drunken time-wasting, John rescued this sparkling tribute to the bygone era that he adored. Its tracks were all cover versions, and hardly the mass anthems or scarred confessionals Lennon was known for. Yet *Rock'N'Roll* was both revealing and delightful. These same tracks resurrected the leather-clad, greasy-quiffed Liverpool teenager who still lived inside John Lennon's head.

It began from mixed motives. Living in LA and newly separated from Yoko, John sought diversion in the far-from-stabilising company of his old producer Phil Spector. Pop culture by 1973 was increasingly fond of its own history, evidenced by films like *American Graffiti* and cover albums including Bryan Ferry's *These Foolish Things* and David Bowie's *Pin Ups*. Through an album of oldies, John believed he could dodge the pressure of expectations while indulging himself in some knockabout nostalgia.

More specifically, there was the problem of Morris Levy. One of John's final numbers for The Beatles, 'Come Together' off *Abbey Road*, was judged to resemble an old Chuck Berry track 'You Can't Catch Me', to which Mr Levy – a canny showbiz veteran – owned the copyright. He duly sued and, in settlement, it was agreed that John would make three new recordings of Levy assets. He next reasoned that such blasts-from-the-past would sit awkwardly on one of his regular albums. Thus an entire retro project was planned, with Phil Spector at the controls.

Once Spector was in the studio, the Wall Of Sound creator reverted to type. Far from the disciplined minimalism of *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, and the tasteful restraint of

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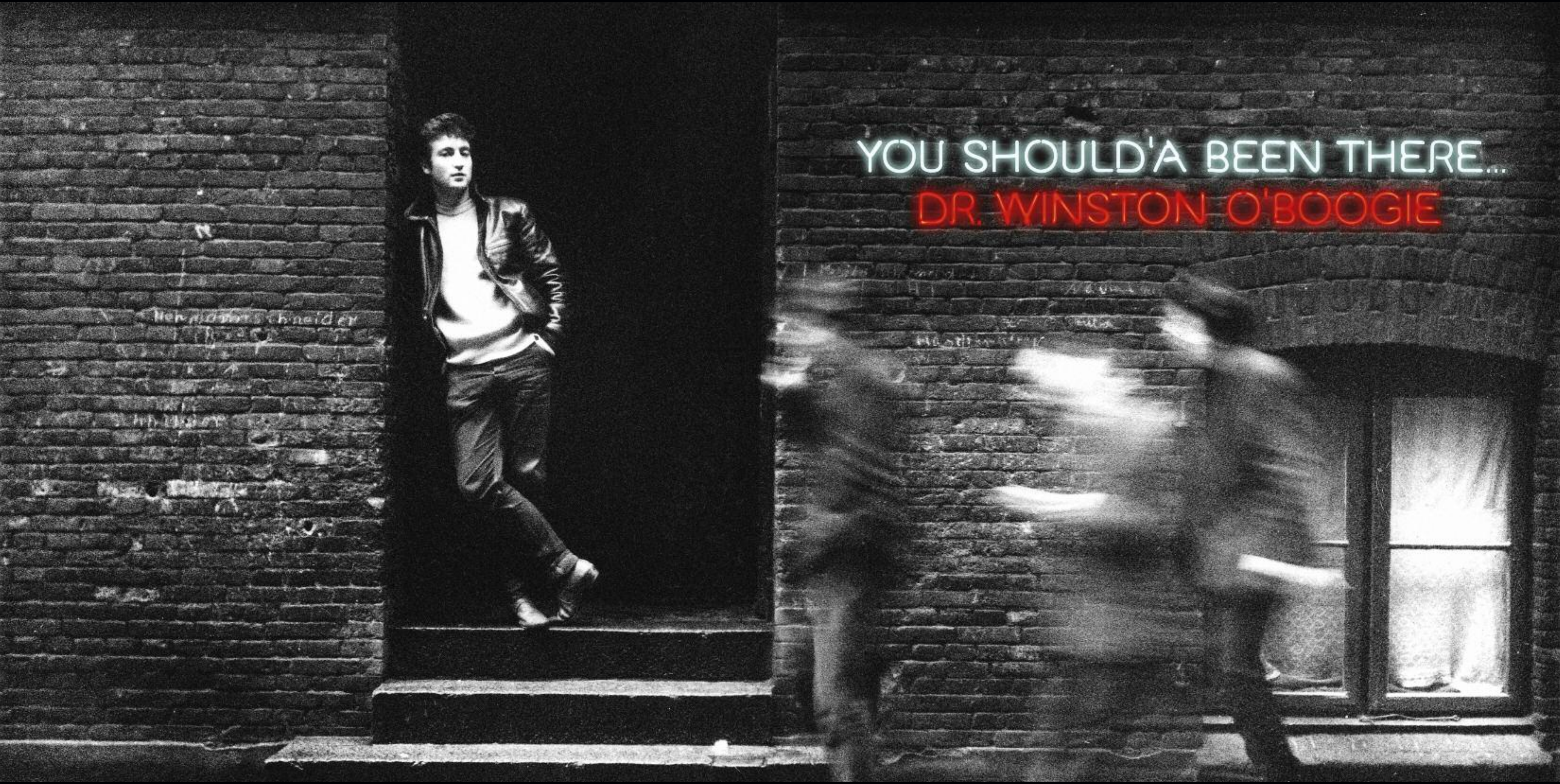
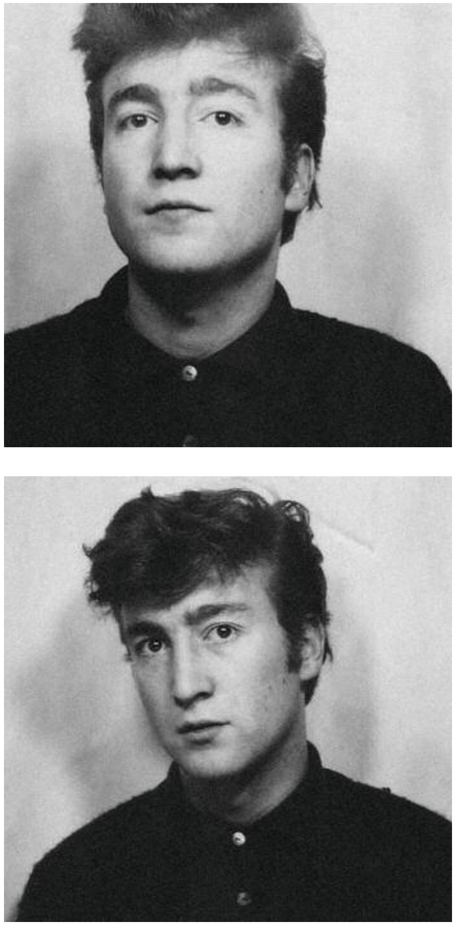

YOU SHOULD'A BEEN THERE...
DR. WINSTON O'BOOGIE

John Lennon

Imagine, here were massed ranks of LA's finest (and most expensive) session players, all in raucous assembly. John, by now embarked on the year of wild living that was dubbed his "Lost Weekend", was scarcely in a state to restore order. October and December saw the recording sessions lurch drunkenly from one location to the next, with scandalously little to show for it.

Eventually the sessions collapsed. Phil Spector vanished and took the tapes with him. John examined his own predicament and began cleaning up his act. The first step was a return to New York, to produce Harry Nilsson's album *Pussy Cats*. Newly inspired, he went straight on to his own *Walls And Bridges*, the classic document of his recent time in the wilderness. Capitol's Al Coury, in the meanwhile, had secured those missing tapes from Phil Spector, but John was naturally too focussed on his new record to go there.

Walls And Bridges' closing snippet, 'Ya Ya', an old Lee Dorsey hit and a Morris Levy copyright, was a weak attempt (summarily rejected) to stall the unresolved legal matter. With Levy impatient, John accepted the inevitable and took his *Walls And Bridges* crew back into Record Plant East to finish what he and Spector had started a year previously. Little remains, on the album we know as *Rock'N'Roll*, of those initial LA sessions. Little, in fact, was deemed salvageable.



In late October, 1974, John completed an album's worth of material made famous by such heroes as Little Richard, Sam Cooke and of course Chuck Berry. ("If you tried to give rock'n'roll another name," he once said on *The Mike Douglas Show*, "you might call it Chuck Berry"). Gene Vincent's lascivious 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' was a song John had played on stage in 1957, at the church hall show where he first met Paul McCartney. Such music was, of course, the bedrock of The Beatles' repertoire until John and Paul's songwriting talents blossomed. Even so, homages to Chuck Berry, et al, would still pepper the band's early albums.

Larry Williams was several times covered by The Beatles ('Dizzy Miss Lizzy' being one instance), but John had another reason to include 'Bony Moronie'. He had performed it, with his first band The Quarrymen, on the only occasion his mother Julia witnessed him on stage. There was an even earlier memory of his mother in Fats Domino's 'Ain't That A Shame' – the first song he learned, he said; it was taught to him by Julia, on a banjo.

Rock'N'Roll may have begun as a legal obligation, and turned into a fiasco, but it was finally a labour of love. Both affectionate and distanced, its style is not of the frenzied Cavern Club days, but of a man relaxing into the simple joy of playing his all-time favourite music. The beautiful cover portrait of John, taken by his Hamburg friend Jurgen Vollmer in 1961, encapsulates his reflective take on that distant time. In 'Just Because', John signs off the album with a mock-showbiz speech. He later guessed it was his sub-conscious farewell to the whole music world.

The album would appear in February, 1975, a mere five months after *Walls And Bridges* and a few weeks after a major turning point in his life – his reunion with Yoko.

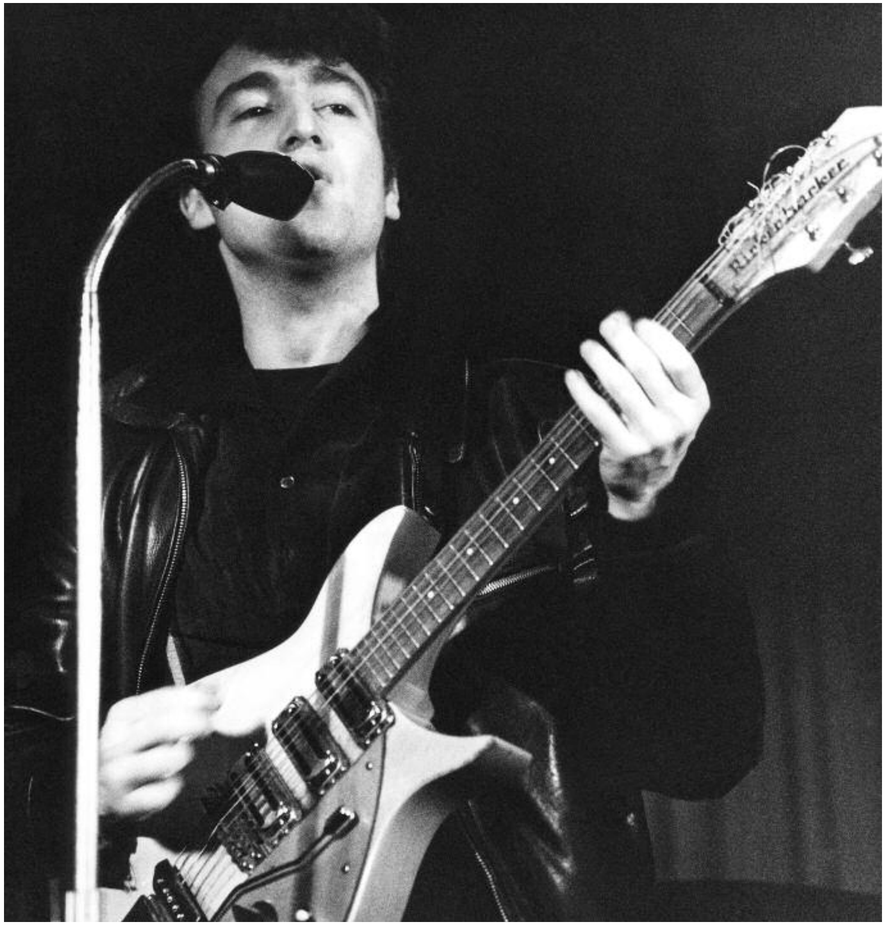
Nowadays, Yoko can enjoy *Rock'N'Roll* as perhaps the most straightforward of all John's solo records. "The album *Rock'N'Roll* is amazing," she says. "He was not just somebody who came in from the cold to the rock world... like me. His musical roots were Fats Domino, Gene Vincent and Chuck Berry – while mine were Bach, Brahms, and Beethoven. Nobody can sing classic rock like John did. With this album, especially, he showed that he was one of the kings of Rock'n'Roll."

All of a sudden, John's life developed in several positive ways. The Beatles' festering contract dispute was finally resolved. Things were looking up in that US visa case, as well. And most of all, he was invited back to the Dakota.

In October of 1975, the Lennons' reunion produced the greatest blessing of their lives, in the form of baby Sean. Recalls Yoko: "The day before he was born, in other words on October 8th, we got the notice that John got the immigration Green Card. And Sean was born four hours later, early on the 9th. Oh, and that was John's birthday too! So, all three happened 1, 2, 3. John had the biggest smile."

He then decided that he will take care of the baby. Yoko should take care of the business end. "And no more Rock'N'Roll!"

That really was it, for five whole years. For the first time since he had formed The Beatles, John Lennon found time to be peaceful, to sit around, to watch the wheels. But the most shocking chapter in his story was still to be written.



Produced and Arranged by John Lennon (October 21-25, 1974) except 'You Can't Catch Me', Sweet Little Sixteen', 'Bony Moronie' and 'Just Because': Produced by Phil Spector/ Arranged by John and Phil (October 1973 to December 1973)

Be-Bop-A-Lula: T. Davis/G. Vincent (Carlin Music Corp). **Stand By Me:** Leiber/Stoller/King (Hornall Brothers Music Ltd). **Medley: A. Rip It Up:** Blackwell/Marascalco (Peter Maurice Music Co Ltd). **B. Ready Teddy:** Blackwell/Marascalco (Carlin Music Corp). **You Can't Catch Me:** Berry (Windswept Music (London) Ltd). **Ain't That A Shame:** Domino/Bartholomew (Francis Day & Hunter Ltd/EMI Music Publishing Ltd/Isalee Music Pub. Co). **Do You Wanna Dance:** Freeman (EMI Music Publishing Ltd). **Sweet Little Sixteen:** Berry (Jewel Music Pub. Co. Ltd/Isalee Music Pub. Co). **Slippin' And Slidin':** Penniman/ Bocage/Collins/ Smith (Sony/ATV Music Publishing Ltd/Universal Music Publishing MGB Ltd). **Peggy Sue:** Allison/Petty/Holly (Peermusic (UK) Ltd). **Medley: A: Bring It On Home To Me:** Cooke (Sony/ATV Music Publishing (UK) Ltd. **B. Send Me Some Lovin':** Marascalco/ Price (Snout Music). **Bony Moronie:** Williams (Sony/ ATV Music Publishing (UK) Ltd). **Ya Ya:** Dorsey/Lewis/Robinson (Tro Essex Music Ltd). **Just Because:** Price (EMI Music Publishing Ltd)

Recorded at: Record Plant, East/ Record Plant, West/A&M Studios. Engineers: Roy Cicala, Lee Keifer (You Can't Catch Me), Shelly Yakus (Slippin' And Slidin'). Assistant Engineer: Jim Iovine. Remix Engineers: Roy Cicala, Jim Iovine (Sweet Little Sixteen). Relived by: J.L. Mastered at: The Cutting Room, Record Plant, New York; Gregg Calbi. Production Co-ordinator and Mother Superior: May Pang. Art Direction and Design: Roy Kohara. Photography: Jurgen Vollmer. Neon Lettering: John Uomoto

Remaster Project Production
Producer: Yoko Ono.
Project Co-ordinator: Allan Rouse.
Remaster Engineers: Paul Hicks, Sean Magee. Audio Restoration: Simon Gibson. Remastered at Abbey Road Studios, London, England, 2010

Sleeve notes by Paul Du Noyer. Additional photography: Jurgen Vollmer, Astrid Kirchherr. Passport photos on page 4 © Lenono Photo Archive

Art direction by Yoko Ono. Design by Peacock. Artwork Co-ordinator: Karla Merrifield. Photo research: Xilonen Oreshnick. Project management by Timothy Ryan, Jane Ventom, Kris Perera and Guy Hayden

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